This work is the proceedings of a meeting organised in 1978 but which includes references up to 1980, suggesting that it took some time to prepare. The initial chapter by Asberg is entitled Biochemical Abnormalities in Depressive Illness: Effects of Drugs; but it is only eight pages in length and half the chapter deals with the concept and classification of depression and the relationship between plasma levels of antidepressant drugs and clinical efficacy. The section dealing with the biochemical effects of tricyclic antidepressants examines only their acute pharmacology whereas it is now accepted that chronic adaptive changes are important in the treatment of depression. An informative chapter by Wood and Coppen is followed by a description of Green's original findings that ECT in animals can alter monoamine-mediated responses in brain. The following chapters deal with dopaminergic abnormalities in schizophrenia but this chapter was written at a time when the dopamine hypothesis was fashionable whereas now it receives much criticism. Crow deals with a carefully controlled trial of the isomers of flupenthixol in the treatment of schizophrenia, which demonstrates that only the dopamine active isomer is effective in the treatment of this disorder. Interestingly, some weeks of drug treatment were necessary before any beneficial effect on schizophrenia was observed. This data is coupled with post-mortem studies looking at changes in dopamine and its metabolites and numbers of dopamine receptors in brains taken from schizophrenics at necropsy. Curzon deals with transmitter metabolism and behavioural abnormalities in liver failure. and examines initially the influence of altered tryptophan concentration on brain 5HT metabolism under normal conditions, in human liver disease and in animal models. This is followed by a discussion of similar effects of tyrosine on brain catecholamine metabolism and other neurochemical changes occurring as a result of liver disturbance, the last major chapter by Bowen and Davidson deals with the biochemistry of Alzheimer's disease and specifically with the involvement of cerebral cholinergic systems. Though much evidence points towards such involvement, the authors conclude that more work is needed to establish whether the cholinergic system is selectively affected in Alzheimer's disease. Overall, a book which contains a lot of interesting background reading but which has been superseded by the passage of time.

PJ JENNER

Post-traumatic Neurosis. By MR Trimble. (Pp 156; £13·60.) Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1981.

What do Professor John Eric Erichsen, Dr Herbert W Page, and the early days of railways have in common? The answer is that in 1882 the first wrote about the clinical and medical legal aspects of "concussion of the spine" caused by railway accidents, and the second, Surgeon to the London and North-West Railway, published a book in which he refuted Erichsen's views on the relationship between railway accidents and the physical and emotional sequelae of them. Whereas Erichsen believed that accidents caused injury to the spinal cord by the mechanism of concussion resulting in a wide variety of symptoms he had no direct evidence to support his thesis. Page, on the other hand, showed more common sense and was more thorough in his research. In 1885 he wrote that, "nervous shock in its varied manifestations is so common after railway collisions, and the symptoms thereof play so prominent a part in all cases which become the subject of medico-legal enquiry, whether they be real or feigned, we are almost sure to meet with the symptoms of it associated with pains and points of tenderness along the vertebral spinal processes . . . we cannot help thinking that it is this combination of the symptoms of general nervous prostration, or shock, and pains in the back . . . which has laid the foundation of the views—erroneous views as we hold them to be—so largely entertained of the nature of these common injuries of the back received in railway collisions".

Using the debate between Page and Erichsen as his starting point, Michael Trimble describes, in a fascinating way, the evolution of medical and legal views about the nature of the wide range of physical and emotional symptoms that follow accidents which, though trivial in terms of the bodily damage they cause, produce chronic physical and mental suffering. The book contains many anecdotes and short case histories which add greatly to the discussion of functional disorders, malingering and battle neurosis. The role of pre-traumatic personality characteristics is assessed with the conclusion that although those with neurotic character traits are more likely to develop symptoms of post-traumatic neurosis, it is also true of a number of those with very stable personalities who seem ill-equipped to deal with sudden, severe incidents which are potentially life-threatening. The penultimate chapter makes very interesting reading because it brings together important medico-legal issues and may well be of value to those who find themselves preparing reports or giving evidence in court. The book sleeve states that "this book is a unique review of the extensive literature which exists on various aspects of post-traumatic neurosis"—with this I agree and recommend unreservedly to all those who are interested in this difficult area of clinical and legal practice.

MR BOND

Sexual Dysfunction in Neurological Disorders: Diagnosis, Management and Rehabilitation. By Francois Boller and Ellen Frank. (Pp 108; $15.64.) New York: Raven Press, 1981.

The authors state in their preface that this book represents an expansion of notes put together for a lecture on sexual dysfunction in neurological disorders. This is an important, but much neglected subject, about which many neurologists and other physicians have less knowledge than perhaps they should. Indeed, the brevity of this book suggests that relatively little work has been done on this subject. The latter part of the book consists of very brief accounts of the literature in relation to sexual disorders in a number of different neurological conditions, and resulting from drug treatment, for example, of hypertension. Although useful as a source of reference, the reader will not find much practical help in dealing with his patient's sexual problems in this part of the book. The earlier chapters consist of a simplified account of autonomic anatomy and physiology, at a level adequate for medical students, followed by a brief account of aspects of clinical history taking, and some appropriate autonomic tests in patients with sexual disorders. This, again, is somewhat unsatisfactory, principally because psychiatric aspects are neglected. Despite the claim in the foreword that the book provides a useful guide to diagnosis and management there is little practical advice to be had about the management and treatment of patients with disturbed sexual function. Perhaps this reflects the absence of information in the literature rather than a shortcoming in the book. Sexual dysfunction in neurological disorders is undoubtedly a subject worth investigation and deserving review but this volume will not provide the answers needed by the practising physician.

M SWASH